

# BRIDPORT WILDCATS 1912

Rebellious Sounds Archive  
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In 1912 a group of women who worked for Gundry's Net Making Factory went on strike in Bridport, Dorset to campaign against pay cuts. They were called the Bridport Wildcats because they had no union backing. While for many better known activists it has taken years to get what they called for, they achieved their goal in days.

On a Friday in February in 1912, the women who worked on French Netting Machines at Gundry's were told that their wages would be cut to equal those of the other female employees who worked on the other machines. This angered the women and they refused to take a pay cut. They then marched through Bridport waving banners and singing suffragette songs such as Ethel Smyth's March of the Women, which was the suffragette anthem.



The Bridport Wildcats from Libcom.org

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In their protest the women received support from the whole town and they raised almost £10, which is about £800 today. They were offered arbitration by the local MP but refused and were on strike for nearly a week. Eventually a trade union official from London called Ada Newton of the National Federation of Women's Workers came to Bridport and signed the women up to the Union. They then reached an agreement with the factory owner Mr. Macdonald and the women returned to work.

Their protest was reported in the Bridport News and there were photos of them taken by the local photographer Clarence Austin. However after this they seemed to disappear without trace, until in 2015 when they were commemorated in re-enactment by a group of local women. These women dressed in period costume and marched through the town singing suffragette songs like the original protestors did. Then they went to the former site of Gundry's Factory to finish their commemoration of the activists. Currently there is a play being written about the Bridport Wildcats and there was an exhibition of Clarence Austin's photographs to help remember the Bridport Wildcats.

Researched and written by Elizabeth Strange, Curatorial Research Volunteer, with special thanks to Margery Hookings for suggesting the Bridport Wildcats.

#### Bibliography

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